

FULLY HUMAN, FULLY DIVINE

TEXT: Luke 9:28-43a and Luke 22:39-46

One of the ways religious people (meaning we churchy folks) keep chaos at bay and try to create some sort of order in our lives is to keep the liturgical calendar. According to the Christian liturgical calendar, this coming Wednesday is the beginning of Lent, with all its deep meaning, with Easter soon to come.

So, in keeping with our Revised Common Lectionary, today is the day we celebrate “Transfiguration Sunday”. I don’t mean that we celebrate this day with the same passion that we honor Christmas or Easter, but it has significance of its own. It’s a strange story, but its message for us is monumental.

It’s the story of a trip up a mountain. Jesus took his closest friends, Peter, James and John on a hike. They stopped at a place somewhere on that mountain where they were all alone. Then, in one of the strangest tableaux in Scripture, Jesus was transfigured before them. So, what does this mean, “transfigured”? Well, his clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in this world could beach them. And I don’t think Clorox had been invented yet. Then, to add to the strange event, two figures appeared. Wow, it was Moses and Elijah, and they were talking with Jesus. Just to add to the drama, the three disciples heard a rumbling, the scene turned all white, and the voice of God boomed forth, “This is my only Son, the only Son of God. Listen to him.”

As an aside, you may recall that for a story to have veracity in those days, there had to be three witnesses to the event. Well, they were there, twice. The three disciples were witnesses, as were Moses the lawgiver, Elijah the great prophet, and God himself. The Old Testament law of three witnesses was satisfied both on earth and in heaven.

The transfiguration of Jesus Christ was a unique display of his divine character and a glimpse of the glory which was embodied in him. The Son of God came to earth in the form of a man to be the true servant of God and to gift mankind with the greatest gift

ever given, eternal life. The transfiguration of Jesus Christ was a visible sign in the presence of reliable witnesses, of the reality of the power of God and the glory which is Jesus Christ. On the Mount of Transfiguration (commonly thought to be Mount Tabor) Jesus was declared to be Fully Divine, the Son of the Living God.

But Jesus was also Fully Human. St. Francis of Assisi emphasized the love of the humanity of Jesus, without needing to first “prove” or worship his divinity (which Jesus never told us to do). In most of Christian history we have emphasized the divinity, omnipotence, the “almightiness” of Jesus. This makes following him – or loving him – largely unrealistic. We are on two utterly different planes that are rather hard to connect.

So, let’s shift to the second reading from the Gospel of Luke. Here we move ahead in time from the Mount of Transfiguration to the Garden of Gethsemane.

That text says: “And they came to a country place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, ‘Sit down with me, while I pray’. And he took with him Peter and James and John (hmmm...that sounds familiar), and he began to feel dread and to be exceedingly troubled. And he said to them: ‘My soul is sad, even unto death. Wait here and watch...Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’”

These inspired words from the event of Gethsemane show us how truly human Jesus was. He dreaded the prospect, not so much of death itself, as of death under such circumstances: death through a gross miscarriage of justice; death at the hands of the very people he had done so much for; death with such ignominy and disgrace.

The text tells us that Jesus withdrew from the disciples, and kneeling down, he began to pray: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done”. There is no single passage in the New Testament that more acutely depicts how truly human Jesus was. The human Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane is a gripping look at Jesus as the son of man, experiencing humanity before his crucifixion.

For a time and a purpose, Jesus put on the cloak of humanity and felt as people do today. Jesus wept for the suffering of others and for the impending trial and anguish that was coming. Jesus prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. “*Abba*, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” Jesus repeats this prayer twice, and in the account from Luke we read of an “agony” so great that his sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground, and that an angel came to strengthen him.

This is a story that has inspired many, showing a highly relatable, human Jesus who struggles with mortality and the reality of pain and suffering. The crucifixion will be of great cost to Jesus. It is a prospect that psychologically haunts him. But since Christians believe Jesus was fully human and fully *divine*, that latter nature must surely be present too.

Jesus tells his father “everything is possible for you”, but in a sense, everything was possible for Jesus too. He could have run away. He could have summoned angels and wiped out his opponents. We know what happened ultimately, but our understanding is amplified when we recognize it was a free choice. A choice which was paradoxically not the imposition of will, but the relinquishing of it to divine purposes.

The Mount of Transfiguration and the Garden of Gethsemane are worlds apart, yet viewed together they tell us a lot about Jesus.

For many Christians today, Jesus is totally divine, but not really human. The paradox of the dual Christ is just too much for some rational minds to grasp. Yet, you

and I are also children of heaven and children of earth; we are children of God and children of this world. Both are true simultaneously.

Christianity is saying that we need a model, an exemplar, a promise, and a guarantee (words used in Pauline letters) to imagine such a far-off impossibility. For us, that living model is Jesus. He was acknowledged in glory, in his full divinity, so that we might know that he came from his Father, our God, into the world. He acknowledged his full humanity with an honesty that we might share with our own parents. He prayed a radical prayer that human beings who follow him are invited to make their own. In the face of whatever anxieties may befall us in our own lives, we remember the words of the human Christ: “Yet, not my will, but yours be done.” Amen